

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 09605 192224Z

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

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R 192134Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8464

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS - DANGERS AND
OPPORTUNITIES

1. AT THE OUTSET OF THE CAMPAIGN, ALL EVIDENCE INDICATES
PRESIDENTIAL RACE WILL BE HARD FOUGHT, BITTER AND CLOSE.
EMBASSY VIEWS ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A MITTERRAND, A
CHABAN-DELMAS OR A GISCARD D'ESTAING PRESIDENCY WILL
BE SPELLED OUT IN SUBSEQUENT MESSAGES.

2. ALL THREE PRINCIPAL CANDIDATES HAVE ALREADY UNDER-
SCORED THEIR COMMITMENT TO AT LEAST ONE IMPORTANT ASPECT
OF RECENT FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY, I.E., RESISTANCE TO ANY
IMPINGEMENT ON FRANCE'S ABILITY TO PURSUE ITS NATIONAL
GOALS IN THE INTERNATIONAL AREA. IN THESE CIRCUM-
STANCES, WE BELIEVE WE SHOULD BE PARTICULARLY CIRCUM-
SPECT DURING THE CAMPAIGN IN AVOIDING ANY ACTION WHICH
COULD BE CONSTRUED AS U.S. EFFORT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF
THE TEMPORARY POWER VACUUM IN FRANCE TO PURSUE U.S.
OBJECTIVES WHICH FRANCE HAS CONSISTENTLY OPPOSED. THE
DANGER, IF SUCH ISSUES ARE RAISED, IS THAT FRANCO-
AMERICAN RELATIONS COULD BECOME EMBROILED IN THE CAM-
PAIGN AND THE CANDIDATES MIGHT BE COMPELLED TO TAKE
STANDS WHICH WOULD RESTRICT THEIR ABILITY TO ADOPT A
MORE ACCOMMODATING POSTURE TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES
AFTER THE ELECTION.

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3. THE ELECTIONS ALSO PRESENT AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE

UNITED STATES IN THAT GISCARD, CHABAN AND EVEN MITTERRAND, APPEAR AT THIS STAGE WILLING TO CHANGE THE STYLE, AND PERHAPS OVER TIME SOME ASPECTS OF THE SUBSTANCE, OF FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY. BARRING SOME SORT OF DRAMATIC US-FRENCH CONFRONTATION DURING THE CAMPAIGN, IT IS REASONABLE TO EXPECT LESS STRIDENTLY NEGATIVE GOF APPROACH TO FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS AFTER THE ELECTIONS THAN MARKED THE FINAL MONTHS OF THE POMPIDOU REGIME. WHILE WE MUST, OF COURSE, CONTINUE NORMAL BUSINESS WITH FRANCE AND EUROPE, FOR EXAMPLE ON QUESTIONS SUCH AS ARTICLE XVIV.6, A LOW KEY U.S. APPROACH DURING THE CAMPAIGN TO DEEPER ISSUES INVOLVING US-EC RELATIONS, WHICH WILL OTHERWISE PROBABLY BE ON THE BACK-BURNER IN EUROPE UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTIONS, WOULD PUT US IN THE BEST POSITION FOR DEALING WITH THE NEW GOF.

IRWIN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, FOREIGN RELATIONS, PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, ELECTION CANDIDATES, ELECTION FORECASTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974PARIS09605
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740092-0600
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740429/aaaaazpm.tel
Line Count: 78
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 APR 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <26 MAR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS - DANGERS AND OPPORTUNITIES
TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, FR
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005